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ABSTRACT

Over 60 years of American anthropological and sociological research writings have erected a concept of culture that restricts its role in planned change models to one of active or tacit resistance to change. As an alternative, this paper suggests that the substitution of a contemporary, dynamic conceptualization of culture as developed by cognitive anthropologists and organizational communication researchers may have significant impact upon (1) our understanding of development; (2) perceptions of the relationship between development and culture; and (3) current formulations addressing the types and effectiveness of alternative communication channels used for planned change in societies. (Seven pages of references are included.) (Author/SKC)

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Traditional Media and Indigenous Culture: Rethinking Developmental Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Over sixty years of American anthropological and sociological research writings have erected a concept of culture that restricts its role in planned change models to one of active or tacit resistance to change. It is suggested that the substitution of a contemporary, dynamic conceptualization of culture as developed by cognitive anthropologists and organizational communication researchers may have significant impact upon (a) our understanding of development, (b) perceptions of the relationship between development and culture, and (c) current formulations addressing the types and effectiveness of alternative communication channels used for planned change.

Since the 1950's communication has been recognized as a major fundamental component in the processes of modernization. Indeed, Soja (1968, p. 3) described communication as "The grid or matrix over which modernization takes place." Due to the theoretical and research paradigms dominant within Western, and particularly American society, at the time much theoretical and research attention focused on aspects of this matrix associated with mass communication channels at the expense of traditional or indigenous communication channels.

Mass media and media systems were perceived as essential to third world modernization efforts. Lerner (1958, 1972), drawing upon historical analogies, emphasized the role of Western-style media systems in social development noting that:

> We know that empirically that media systems and social systems have "gone together" so regularly because in some historical sense they had to go together (1972, p. 864).

For Lerner (1958) and Gompertz (1960) mass media were essential to modernization because of their intrinsic ability to create a state of psychic readiness or empathy toward change in receivers. Theories of modernization, development, or innovation by Berlo (1960), Schramm (1963, 1971), De Sola Pool (1963), Rogers (1969, 1976, 1983), Rogers and Shoemaker (1971), Nesman (1981), and Deutschman (1963) all suggested a sensitizing or awareness role for modern mass media systems in the modernization process. In part, this focus on media systems derived from

theorists' (a) conceptualizations of modernization and communication as linear, mathematically measurable processes (Schramm, 1971; Lerner, 1958, 1972; Laswell, 1948; Shannon and Weaver, 1949), (b) concern for communication effects (Mytton, 1983), (c) inadequate conceptualizations of both pre-Western media systems and traditional cultures and their role in modernization (Eschenbach 1977; Hatchten, 1971; Schramm, 1963; De Sola Pool, 1963), and (d) models of change that were primarily source oriented and explicitly or implicitly specified the importance of control over the flow and content of communication.

In the post Vietnam era of the 1970's, failures of development and modernization efforts in numerous developing nations caused scholars to question the relevance and applicability of American originated development theories and practices to the reality of modernization in rapidly changing nations. Criticism came from both within the Western research traditions (Golding, 1974; Grunig, 1971; Elliot and Golding, 1974; Rogers, 1976, 1983; Illich, 1973, 1978) and from intellectuals within the developing nations themselves (Bordenave, 1976; Beltran, 1976, 1980; Shingi and Mody, 1976). Criticisms of diffusion research have focused on (a) the perceived pro-innovation bias of development strategists and change agents (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Rogers, 1983), (b) the individual blame bias which views individuals as responsible for their own problems and failure to change (Beltran, 1980; Rogers, 1983), (c) research methods which emphasize static comparisons

and outcomes at the expense of an understanding of the process nature of communication and modernization (Rogers, 1983; Roling, Ascroft, and Chege, 1976), (d) the tactics and goals of modernization (Freire, 1968; Illich, 1971, 1973, 1978; Fessler, 1976; Bunch, 1982), and (e) the generalizability of both scientific and process assumptions derived in the context of American research and experience to patterns of cultural and social change prevalent within developing nations.

DEVELOPMENT

As Zaltman and Duncan (1977) note, formal definitions of change or development are relatively rare in development literature. Often theorists focus on the variables affecting the change process at the expense of conceptualization or definition. It may be that reasons for this lack of explicit conceptualization lie in the diversity of technical and social scientific disciplines contributing models and theories of change, each of which models the process in terms of the units of analysis, variables, methodology, and outcomes specific to the theorists' chosen discipline.

However, a brief review of development literature does seem to indicate that whether the process is labeled social change, innovation, modernization, planned change, or development, specific characteristics and assumptions are common to most modern theories of development. It is these shared

characteristics which we will use to derive a heuristic definition of development.

Regardless of whether they view the target of development as individuals, organizations, or entire cultures and social systems, most modern developmental theorists view development as "an indefinitely ramified, dovetailing and intertwined reality...[which] cannot be easily, in piecemeal fashion, dropped out of native culture" (Malinowski, 1945, p. 53). Within this systems perspective development is often viewed as a response by some unit of a system to some level of system disequilibrium brought about by economic pressures (Schultz, 1964; Nesman, 1981; Arensberg & Niehoff, 1964; Schramm, 1963), psychological pressures (Musgrove, 1982; Pye, 1963; Bunch, 1982; Rogers, 1983; Lerner, 1958, 1972; Triandis, 1972; Downs, 1967; Zaltman & Duncan, 1977), or social and situational factors (Musgrove, 1982; Tarde, 1903; Etzioni & Etzioni-Halery, 1973; Bascom & Herskovitz, 1959), or a combination of these factors.

Lerner (1958, 1972), in positing a communication theory of modernization, viewed modernity as the outcome of the development process. For Lerner, "The acquisition of and diffusion of psychic mobility [was]... the greatest characterological transformation in modern history... the most fundamental human factor that must be comprehended by all who plan economic growth by means of rapid social change" (1972, p. 867); and it was modern Westernized mass media systems, controlled by Westernized, elite, professional communicators which formed the single most

salient instrument for teaching individuals new human and social skills and stimulating desires and cognitive traits compatible "with a rising level of industrial capacity" (1972, p. 871).

Lippit (1973) in his analysis of social change distinguishes between two types of change which he labels "transmitted" and "transformed social change" (p. 38). While transmitted change is defined as evolutionary and undirected, transformed change or planned change is characterized as "any intended, designed, or purposive attempt by an individual, group, organization, or larger social system to influence directly the status quo of itself, another organism, or a situation" (p. 37). For Niehoff (1966) change agents external to the change target system planned and implemented these purposive attempts.

Drawing heavily on the definitions of social change of Rogers (1983) and Rogers and Shoemaker (1971), Zaltman and Duncan (1977):

> define change at the individual and system level as an alteration in the way an individual or group of individuals behave as a result of an alteration in their definition of the situation (p. 9) and go on to define planned change as "a deliberate effort with a stated goal on the part of a change agent to create a modification in the structure and process of a social system such that it requires members of that system to relearn how they perform their roles" (p. 10).

This concern for relearning and redefinition of situation and roles, directed by a change agent, also lies at the center of the liberation development philosophy of Freire (1968) with its focus on conscicentization or consciousness raising as a planned

developmental process with the explicit goal of returning to the people the ability to act against oppression. Indeed, Lerner (1958, 1972), Bunch (1982), and Rogers (1983), as well as other developmental theorists, stress the need for change targets to learn new behaviors, social skills, and ways of thinking if development is to occur. Pilotta (1984) stresses that technological development is contingent upon target sociocultural groups relearning systems of relevance whereby new ideas and technologies acquire meaning and function within the reality specified by the interconnections between values, behaviors, and cognitions.

Within the context of development in the Third World development may be conceptually defined as a complex integrated planned process implemented, by change agents external to the change target system, to achieve specified goals which require individuals and organizations to redefine, or learn new patterns of thinking and acting which over time establish some new state of equilibrium within the target system.

This conceptualization of development as something done to individuals and groups may be directly related to traditional views of the nature of culture, its relationship to individual activity and cognition, and its role in development.

INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Texts on development or planned change note the critical role that the indigenous or traditional culture of the target system plays in facilitating or inhibiting the development

process. Authors positing theories of development or developmental models stress the role of cultural variables such as belief and value systems, perceptual systems, normative patterns of behavior, and religion in creating and maintaining resistance on the part of specified change targets, to planned or advocated changes. Indeed, many strategies for achieving specified changes have been specifically developed to overcome the perceived resistance that indigenous cultures pose to alterations in the status quo of a system (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977; Rogers, 1983; Pye, 1963; Musgrove, 1982). In part this preoccupation with indigenous cultures as a force resisting the efforts of change impacts on the whole structure and organization of a target system), but more importantly it stems from a social-scientific tradition which conceptualizes culture and denotes its functions in terms which proscribe its role in development and restrict its potential role to one of active or tacit resistance to change.

Beginning with the work of Tylor (1871) 60 years of American anthropological and sociological writers have erected a concept of culture that has separated culture from the individuals who possess it. As such, culture became a complex totality independent from the individual, external to him/her, but impinging upon all aspects of life. Culture became a highly reified, abstract, autonomous, and superpersonal concept which existed before the individual was born and which would continue after his/her death. Tylor (1871) defined:

> culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (p. 1).

Kroeber (1917) characterized culture as "the superorganic" something which was above the sum of individuals and which was irreducible to psychological terms or explanation. As such, culture constituted a "social substance" distinct from mind and body which "transcends them utterly". Although Durkheim (1938) substituted "social facts" or "conduct" for culture, he attributed to these social facts the same external pervasive characteristics Kroeber attributed to culture:

> These types of conduct or thought are not only external to the individual but are, moreover, endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will (Durkheim, 1938, p. 2).

Thus for Myres (1927), Sutherland and Woodward (1940), Sapir (1921), Lowie (1936), White (1946), and Kluckhohn (1950), culture was not only supraindividual, but it also functioned as "historically created designs for living" (Kluckhohn & Kelly, 1945, p. 97). The role of culture in the lives of individuals was clear: It provided "... a set of ready-made definitions of the situation which each participant only slightly retailors in his own idiomatic way" (Kluckhohn & Kelly, 1945, p. 91). It is "what remains of men's past, working on their present, to shape their future" (Myres, 1927, p. 16). It provides "continuous methods of handling problems and social situations ..." (Young, 1934, pp. 18-19), and it "... inhibits impulses or permits their

distorted satisfaction" (Roheim, 1934, p. 216). Murdock (1932) comments

> Moreover, the individual is not a free agent with respect to culture. He is born and reared in a certain cultural environment, which impinges upon him at every moment of his life... He has no choice but to conform to the folkways current in his group. Culture is superindividual, also, in the fact that its constituent folkways have in every case a history of their own, a history of their origin and diffusion which is quite independent of the lives and qualities of individuals (p. 206).

Hall (1973, p. 28) treats culture in its entirety as a form of communication and, much like Kuhun's (1962) paradigms, it functions as a pervasive set, a "series of situational models for behavior and thought" (Hall, 1977, p. 13) "and as such [is] an arbitrary, learned, shared, extension system whereby internal (cognitive) processes acquire external (physical) properties which allow man to shape and 'alter' his environment (Hall, 1977, p. 27).

More recently, this deterministic view of culture and its relationship to the individual has been challenged by scholars within the disciplines of cognitive anthropology (Geertz, 1973, 1983; Turner, 1974, 1980) and organizational communication (Pettigrew, 1979); Pfeffer, 1951; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, 1983; Trujillo, 1984; Weick, 1979). Drawing heavily on symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) and the metaphor of performance (Goffman, 1959) these authors conceptualize individuals as actors capable of formulating individual decisions and performing actions or

behaviors by which the features of culture come into being, acquire meaning, and are modified or maintained.

Olsen (1978) suggests that social life

> ... is a process that is continually being created and recreated as individuals bring order and meaning to their collective social life (p. 4).

This ordering occurs at a variety of social levels varying from individual cognitive structuring through various levels of shared ordering which "grows out of the interactions and their relationships of individuals as these activities become patterned and recurrent through time" (Olsen, 1978, p. 7). Indeed culture for Olsen (p. 163) is the shared sets of ideas "that symbolize, reflect, and give meaning to the social order." Drawing upon this conceptualization, Gudykunst and Kim (1984) have stipulated that "culture refers to that relatively unified set of shared symbolic ideas associated with societal patterns of cultural ordering" (p. 4). As such, culture arises from the processes by which individuals come to perceive social order and give it meanings which are then communicated and shared with others through individual and communal actions. Thus, culture influences and guides but does not fully determine people's actions and interpretations. Indeed, as Barnett (1953) suggested, culture in its totality is beyond the experience of any single member of the culture. The truth embedded in this observation, I propose, lies not so much in the deterministic pervasive relationship of individuals to their culture, which places it beyond individual knowing, but rather in the

impossibility of individuals' participating in all types and instances of interactions through which culture, over time, comes into being.

Geertz (1973) states:

> The concept of culture I expouse... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing with Max Weber that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance (meaning) he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (p. 5).

Within this conceptualization:

> Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions or processes can be attributed, it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly ...described (Geertz, 1973, p. 14).

Culture then represents a fund of ideas, symbols, or ideologies which are to some extent shared with others, and upon which we draw to construct and carry out social activity.

The reflexive relationship between individual actions, and behavior and culture perhaps finds its strongest expression in the research on organizational culture. Within the dramaturgical metaphor of performance adopted by Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982, 1983) and Trujillo (1984), culture is viewed as a social construction, a context, always being reconstructed through the process of shared performances which not only create and reify features of the context but are also embedded in an organizational history which is what remains of previous performances. As Turner (1980) observed, reality is not recreated anew in every communicative (shared) performance.

Social reality contains residues of previous performances that guide the construction and performance of actions and their interpretation. Indeed, reflecting on the definition of culture offered by Myres (1927), what remains of man's past are the webs of significance shared behaviors have brought into existence and given meaning as reality. These shared behaviors, then, represent not only instances of rule-conforming sequences of symbolic acts, but also rule-constituting sequences generated by two or more participants.

The conceptualization of culture as a context offered by Geertz, Turner, Pacanowsky, and others lays a foundation for reconceptualizing the relationship between development and indigenous culture. From this perspective:

1. Culture is dynamic.

A conceptualization of culture as an inherently incomplete socially constructed reality continually in the process of reconstruction rather than a static assemblage of "what is" suggests that culture is amenable to change or alteration and may serve as a mechanism of development, rather than as a barrier to it.

2. Culture and development are reflexive.

A conceptualization of culture as a reality brought into being through the ongoing interactions of individuals suggests that development projects initiated to alter either individual and collective behaviors or individual and

collective symbolic significances, by which behaviors acquire meaning and function for their users, offer equally viable foci for change-strategists interested in achieving long-term developmental goals.

3. Development is dependent on perceived ownership. A conceptualization of culture as socially constructed "webs of significance" suggests that development in any meaningful enduring form occurs only when control of a change in behavior or significance is perceived to pass from an external change-agent or institution to the social actors or web spinners.

Thus, drawing upon the previously posited conceptual definition of development, meaningful development may be conceptualized as a complex integrated planned process initiated by change agents or institutions external to the change target system, but in which perceived ownership of the change becomes transferred to the social actors and is transmitted across time to new members of the target system through the interactive channels of socialization. Implicit in this conceptualization of meaningful development is the suggestion that the significances by which behaviors acquire meaning and function within target systems are constructed and controlled by social actors who learn and transmit meanings and symbolic significances through interaction, over time, with one another. Thus short-term change

at the individual, group, or society-wide level does not constitute development, since redefined or learned significances, meanings, and behaviors fail to become routinized or institutionalized in the reality of the social actors. To suggest that meaningful development occurs in the short-term is to suggest that learning is itself a reversible process without ramifications for consequent cognitions and behaviors.

If a more dynamic receiver centered conceptualization of both culture and development better reflects the actual and potential role of culture in planned change, it might also be useful to reassess the traditional criteria and distinctions specified by researchers for classifying media channels as either mass media or traditional media. Indeed, a receiver centered conceptualization of media channels might provide an alternative departure point for assessing the potential power and utility of media channels in development.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND DEVELOPMENT

The importance of traditional communication channels in development has long been recognized. Schramm (1963), De Sola Pool (1963), Rengeneth (1980), Awa (1980, 1982, 1983), and others have noted the persuasive ability and effectiveness of traditional communication in modernization efforts. Often this role was perceived to be contingent upon the use of mass media to stimulate awareness of new ideas about values, goals, or behaviors whose final adoption depended upon the credibility and pervasiveness of traditional communicators and channels of

communication. Indeed Rogers (1983) suggests that once the innovation-decision process moves beyond a simple knowledge or awareness stage, interpersonal or face to face channels of communication become increasingly important in the development process (pp. 197-201).

Regardless of the role within the developmental process prescribed for traditional channels or systems of communication, the identification of these channels has tended to rely on perceived characteristics which theorists suggest separate them from systems of mass media and which fix them with reference to dimensions associated with technology, scale or audience size, communicator professionalism, distinctness of function, and locus of message source.

Schramm (1963), De Sola Pool (1963), Pye (1963), and Lerner (1958, 1972) characterize traditional communication as "institutionalize(ing) most of the communication behaviors of the individual" (Schramm, 1963, p. 33). As such it is oral, informal, face-to-face, "rooted in the pre-industrial past or focused on the past" (Schramm, 1963, p. 41), embedded in society with information flowing along lines of social hierarchy, and lacking professional communicators (Pye, 1963, p. 24).

The predominantly aural-oral and face-to-face aspects of traditional communication patterns finds support in the research on folk media (Colletta, 1977; Kidd & Byram, 1978; Ranganath, 1980; Ajuwon, 1980; Bappa, 1981) and in analyses of African communication (Doob, 1966; Mytton, 1983; Awa, 1980, 1982, 1983;

Hatchten, 1971). Doob (1966) extends the medium of African communication to include "any object or device whatsoever" (p. 56). The use of drums, smoke signals, flags, or lights simply substitutes indigenous devices for instantaneous face-to-face oral interaction. The use of print or electronic technology is precluded by Doob because of its recent foreign origins.

Cultural embeddedness is a feature of all definitions of traditional media. Indeed, Schramm (1963) notes that

> Only by the most brutal surgery, therefore, can social communication be separated from society... For the facilities of communication are part of the living structure of society... It is the way society lives (p. 35).

Or as Mytton (1983) notes "... in what may be loosely described as traditional society communication activity is not differentiated from other social processes" (p. 6). Ranganath (1980) characterizes folk media as "virgin arts which antecede the mass media" (p. 1) and are capable of "touching the deepest emotions of the illiterate millions" (p. 4). Abrams and Mathur (1982) suggest that folk media not only reflect a people's values and world view but also function as powerful persuasive and educational tools, a view shared by Awa (1980, 1982).

The scale of communication systems is often assessed along dimensions that indicate the size and nature of the audience served. When compared to Westernized mediated channels of communication, channels considered traditional were characterized as restricted to members of homogenous groups (Doob, 1961, p. 18) or to individuals already sharing social bonds (Mytton, 1983, p.

6), symbolic referents and values (Ranganath, 1980, p. 7), and aesthetic tastes and standards (Ranganath, 1980, p. 1; Awa, 1980, p. 3; Guidote, 1982, p. 29). Rather than serving widely dispersed heterogenous populations, audiences for traditional media were perceived as relatively isolated and primarily uneducated and rural (Pye, 1963, pp. 24-29). However, as Mytton (1983) notes, "Africa possesses fewer media facilities per head of population than any other continent" (p. 23), and the audience for what media exists tends to be young, urban, educated, employed, and male (Mytton, 1983, p. 26). Awa (1980) also suggests that mass media in Africa serve a select and limited audience. Even radio, the single most common media available in rural Africa, was found to be utilized by only 31 out of 128 rural African subjects in an entire year (Axinn, & Axinn, 1969). Thus, issues of audience size and heterogeneity may be less accurate indicators of media modernity in developing areas where the mass media are themselves limited in scope and social penetration.

Authors such as Pye (1963), Schramm (1963), De Sola Pool (1963), and Mytton (1983) suggest that communicator professionalism is a dimension which distinguishes between traditional and mass media. De Sola Pool (1963) states that "... traditional communicators at the lowest level... have at best very modest intellectual or cultural attainments" (p. 245). Pye (1963) links professionalism of communicators to specialization, indicating that traditional face-to-face

communication and communicators are non-specialized, lacking a distinctive and universal set of standards and objectivity (p. 25), and capable only of expanding upon limited information rather than sifting messages and drawing attention to matters of particular interest (p. 29). Other scholars, such as Awa (1980), Ranganath (1980), Abrams & Mathur (1982), suggest that traditional communicators are indeed professional, often developing their skills over a number of years, and that the issue of professionalism is dependent upon the criteria by which messages are evaluated and whether the evaluation is conducted by theorists and change agents or by the receivers of the messages.

Criteria for defining traditional communication or media that rely on distinctions of technology, audience size and differentiation, or professionalism, and which suggest traditional media (or whatever existed prior to the advent of print or electronic media) seem to the author to be both static in nature and unsatisfactory. Utilizing these definitional characteristics, how would one classify the film industry in India? Are the poetry and novels of Third World authors traditional media, or once committed to print do they become mass media? Both Indian films and African novels are undoubtedly embedded in the cultures of their nations, yet both employ channels which are not only technologically advanced but are also not face-to-face. It would seem that the present descriptive and comparative criteria for defining traditional media provide no means by which media may emerge and remain traditional.

Given a view which stipulates that traditional communication is culturally embedded, that culture and development are reflexive, and that individuals are participants involved in creating shared meanings and behaviors, we suggest that a participant oriented definition of traditional communication may be useful.

Mowlanda (1983) suggests that all media are culturally embedded and that, rather than focus on aspects of message source and content for analysing the relationship between culture and media systems, it is necessary to analyze interactive aspects concerned with the production and distribution of cultural or developmental messages. If meaningful development requires that alterations in shared behavior or meanings become part of ongoing cultural and communication interactions, and that this occurrence coincides with a shift in perceived ownership of the idea or behavior from an external change agent or agency to the participants themselves, then any channels of communication, regardless of technological sophistication, professionalism, or scale, that participants actively use or in which they perceive they can create and disseminate messages, may be defined as traditional. Thus, I suggest that traditional channels of communication are all channels of communication in which participants themselves, or others they identify as members of groupings to which they believe they belong, perceive that they can, or do, participate or interact in constructing shared meanings and significances for stimuli within their environment.

It is within traditional channels of communication that objects and behaviors acquire meaning and function or relevance for change targets. It is also within traditional channels of communication that the perception of ownership is enacted with the possibility of meaningful and enduring change or development taking place as significances and relevances are shared across generations and become part of a group's socialization processes.

A receiver or user oriented definition of traditional channels of communication, rather than relying on classifications based on technology employed or extent and heterogeniety of communication networks, recognizes the multiple group memberships of the users of communication channels and Olsen's (1978) various levels of social ordering. Thus, a user based approach to conceptualization places communication channels within a context and level of social order meaningful to the message producers, disseminators, and receivers, and addresses the critical issue of cultural embeddedness or control necessary for ongoing and enduring development or change.

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